

# **Big Cypress Tree State Park and Natural Area Strategic Management Plan**

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**2023 – 2033**

DRAFT

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## Park Purpose, History and Description

Big Cypress Tree State Park was designated in 1973 to preserve the “Tennessee Titan” champion bald cypress tree. This stately cypress was the largest bald cypress tree in the United States and the largest known tree species east of the Mississippi River. Unfortunately, the tree was struck and killed by lightning in July 1976 and is no longer present. The park’s purpose has evolved into the preservation of a pristine bottomland hardwood forest and to bring all that this beautiful natural area has to offer to Tennesseans and park visitors.

Big Cypress Tree State Park is a 330-acre park located in Weakly County. The park contains 270 acres of designated State Natural Area within its boundaries. A large portion of the park is bottomland hardwood forest, with smaller areas of riparian forest and shrub, and herbaceous plant dominated wetlands located within the natural area. The park hosts a wide variety of native plant life and wildlife.

Picnicking, hiking, and birdwatching are popular activities at the park. There are numerous picnic tables, a picnic shelter, a playground, hiking trails, and a .15-mile boardwalk for park visitors to enjoy.

## Goals, Objectives and Action Plans

### THE RESOURCES: Exemplary Natural and Cultural Stewardship

**Goal:** Tennessee State Parks will be nationally recognized for exemplary stewardship of natural and cultural resources.

**Objective - *More and better stewards:*** Increase internal and external stewards who share Tennessee State Parks core values and can contribute to the State Parks mission to preserve, protect, and share Tennessee’s natural and cultural resources.

Action Plan: Big Cypress Tree has formed partnerships with the University of Tennessee Martin through the biology and natural resource management departments, Weakley County Schools through the Greenfield schools, home school groups, and the Discovery Park of America’s Naturalist Program. We will continue to add partners such as other colleges like Bethel and organizations like the Tennessee Environmental Council.

**Objective - *Better resource management practices:*** Identify, manage, and restore unique natural and cultural resources for generations to come.

Action Plan: Big Cypress has focused on appropriate utilization of space through active natural area restoration projects and non-native documentation/removal. The park will continue with the mindset of embracing the natural area.

**Objective: *Better data and technology:*** Leverage data and technology to help inform and guide decisions on natural and cultural resources stewardship.

Action Plan: Big Cypress utilizes the GIS tools offered by the department to improve mapping and categorizing resources on the park, we stay current on current reporting programs to improve data collection, and we utilize social media and social media teams to reach as many potential visitors as possible.

## THE VISITOR: Welcoming and Inviting to All

**Goal:** Tennessee State Parks will be the most accessible, welcoming, and inviting system of parks that enriches Tennesseans and visitors through excellent interpretation, education, and resource-based recreation.

**Objective:** *accessible, welcoming, and inviting to all:* create quality and varied programs of interpretation, recreation, and outreach so that all audiences feel welcome and invited.

Action Plan: Big Cypress Tree focuses on nature as a uniting theme to bring people of all walks of life together. Our goal in interpretation is to bring the natural area to the public through a number of varied interpretive programs, activities, and resource-based development.

**Objective:** *high quality programming:* develop and support mission-based and resource-relevant programs to engage visitors, empower staff, and develop community wellbeing.

Action Plan: Big Cypress's focus on bringing the natural area to the public ensures that all visitors leave with a deeper understanding of the purpose and goal of Tennessee State Parks and Natural Areas. We offer a natural community gathering location and our interpretive methods aim to increase local knowledge base on natural and preservation.

**Objective:** *resource-based outdoor recreation:* provide resource-based outdoor recreation opportunities that ensure representation of Tennessee's natural, scenic, and cultural resources.

Action Plan: Big Cypress increases public appreciation of parks and natural areas by eliminating city park functions such as baseball fields and increasing resource-based recreation through natural environment restoration while improving and adding opportunities like hiking. We also dedicate time to educating the public about the park through stewardship activities and outdoor classroom instruction.

## THE AMENITIES: Well-Maintained Facilities and Amenities

**Goal:** Tennessee State Parks will be well maintained with facilities and amenities that delight visitors and make Tennesseans proud.

**Objective:** *Improve maintenance:* Improve overall maintenance and upkeep of all park facilities and amenities that contribute to meaningful visitor experiences.

Action Plan: Establish a continuous maintenance plan to maintain or improve current park conditions. This includes preventative maintenance schedules, annual facility evaluations, and formal tracking of deferred maintenance needs.

**Objective:** *Better park accessibility:* ensure all visitors have opportunities for meaningful experiences in every Tennessee State Park.

Action Plan: Big Cypress Tree will facilitate accessibility of the park to the public by maintaining accessible facilities such as the boardwalk and paved trails. We are also working to increase the availability of face-to-face visitor contact opportunities through improving access to the visitor center/park office by increasing the hours of operation and maximizing the impact of work hours with a small pool of full-time employees.

**Objective:** *Quality and welcoming facilities and amenities:* provide high-quality and well-planned facilities and amenities that enrich the visitor experience.

Action Plan: Big Cypress has increased the quality and accessibility of all park facilities over the last four years by addressing deferred maintenance and completing facility improvement projects. Staff will continue to maintain inviting park facilities by ensuring they are clean and always inviting. Additional amenities such as a gift shop and an increased number of resource-based recreational opportunities are planned for the near future.

## THE OPERATIONS: Operational Excellence

**Goal:** Tennessee State Parks will be a national model for operational excellence in a state park system.

**Objective:** *Support and empower our people:* support and empower our workforce by creating a caring environment that encourages professional growth and great customer service.

Action Plan: Big Cypress Tree supports and empowers park staff through a close-knit working relationship focused on a balanced division of responsibilities, encouragement of professional development that supports park goals while engaging employee interests, and fostering an environment that emphasizes employee growth. Providing excellent internal and external customer service is a constant priority.

**Objective:** *Efficient and effective operations:* provide efficient, effective, and fiscally responsible service to Tennesseans and our visitors.

Action Plan: Big Cypress tree will continue to offer the highest quality experience within the limits of its small operational budget. The park will accomplish this by reducing the need of outside contractor's repairs and services, close adherence to Go Green initiatives, and being mindful of preventative maintenance as well as unnecessary waste.

## Park Overview

### Site Fact Sheet

Park Name	Big Cypress Tree State Park
Site Manager	Park Manager Michael Beasley
Area Manager	Area Manager Zach Tinkle
Park acreage	330
Total number of visitors (FY 2022)	26,303
Total expenses before CO (FY 2022)	\$128,748
Total revenues (FY 2022)	1,358
Retail cost recovery % <sup>1</sup>	N/A
Park cost recovery %	1%
Average expense per visitor (FY 2022)	4.89
Average revenue per visitor (FY 2022)	0.05
Gross profit or loss	-127,390
Total full-time available positions / filled	2
Total part-time available positions / filled	0
Primary feeder markets	Local, Public Schools, Universities, Organized Groups, Hunters
Primary reasons people visit	Boardwalk, Trails, Champion Bald Cypress, Picnic
Opportunities for improvement	Rentable Facilities, Addition Trails, Events, Resource Management

### Key Attractions

The amenities or features listed below are those that seem to be most popular for visitors.

- Picnic Shelter
- Park Office/ Visitor Center
- Group Camp
- Restrooms
- Boardwalk Trail
- Paved Trail
- Hunter's Trail
- Native Garden
- Outdoor Classroom

<sup>1</sup> Based on T.C.A. 11-3-305, Cost recovery of revenue-generating facilities

## Site and Operations Assessment

This site and operations assessment is a culmination of analyses and findings from a review of the condition of facilities, infrastructure, and operations at Big Cypress Tree State Park. The findings and observations are not intended to be an exhaustive review of all issues present, but provide a basic understanding of the predominant issues that contribute to the site's current operating conditions. The assessment includes the following:

1. Site and Facilities Assessment
2. Operational Assessment
3. Financial Assessment

## Site and Facility Assessment

### Methodology

Facility and asset conditions are rated using a differential scale of excellent, good, fair, or poor. Descriptions of conditions that are attributed to each of these findings are also provided.

Scale of Conditions	
Rating	General Description
Excellent	Facilities/amenities are in 'excellent' condition when they show little or no maintenance or repair problems. Facilities do not feature any major design or operational issues or flaws that contribute to diminished use or increased maintenance or upkeep. Facilities are easy to clean and maintain in order to place them back into public use and the users perceive them to be in excellent shape.
Good	Facilities/amenities are in 'good' condition when they show only minor maintenance or repair problems. Most maintenance issues with these facilities typically appear to be the result of age and/or heavy use. Facilities may only feature minor design or operational issues that contribute to diminished use or increased maintenance or upkeep. Facilities are moderately easy to clean and maintain in order to place them back into service and the users perceive them to be adequate for their use, but probably not in excellent shape.
Fair	Facilities/amenities are in 'fair' condition when they show significant maintenance or repair problems. Facilities generally exhibit ongoing maintenance issues that appear to be the result of age, heavy use, or design or operational flaws. Some maintenance and repair needs may compound their fair condition by being deferred because of budget and/or resource limitations. Facilities require more effort to clean and maintain before placing them back into service and the users may perceive them as being less than adequate for their use and in a state of deterioration. The facility or structure may need of major repair or replacement.
Poor	Facilities/amenities are in 'poor' condition when they show significant, on-going maintenance or repair problems that ultimately may result in suspended use for repair/replacement. Maintenance and repair issues are possibly the result of poor maintenance and clearly the result of age, heavy use, or design or operational flaws. Problems with the facilities are often compounded over time due to consistently-deferred maintenance and repair because of budget and/or resource limitations. Facilities may feature major design or operational issues that contribute to diminished use or increased maintenance or upkeep. Facilities require excessive effort to clean and maintain before placing them back into service and the users often perceive them as being inadequate for their use and in a state of serious deterioration. The facility or structure may need of major repair or replacement.

## Facility Inventory and Assessment

The table below is an inventory of facilities and amenities at Big Cypress Tree State Park and provides the assessed condition of each as reviewed in May 2023.

Site Asset / Amenity	Quantity	Condition
Park Office	1	Excellent
Maintenance Shop	1	Good
Restrooms	1	Excellent
Picnic Shelter	1	Fair
Outdoor Classroom	1	Excellent
Boardwalk	1	Good

## Trail Inventory and Assessment

Trail Name	Mileage	Condition
Hunter's Trail	0.25	fair
Paved Path	0.20	good
River Trail	0.86	poor
Tree Identification Trail	0.37	good
Grand Total	1.68	

River Trail: 0.85-mile trail through the seasonally flooded bottomland hardwood forest. Paved and boardwalk sections in good condition (0.35 mile). The river trail from boardwalk to the middle fork of the Obion river is in poor condition due to beaver impoundment and fallen trees(0.5 mile). Trail requires extensive resource management and rerouting.

Paved Trail: 0.4-mile trail along the upland portion of the park traveling along the hardwood forest and native garden. The trail is in fair condition and offers a small arboretum of identified trees.

Hunter's Trail: 0.50-mile trail through the state natural area to the Obion River WMA. Trail in fair condition and primarily used by hunters.

## New Assets Needed

List new assets and amenities that would fall under capital expenditures that are needed to improve visitor experience and operational efficiency.

New Asset & Amenities	Description
Interpretive Panels	Panels/ kiosks needed to interpret the natural area
Addition Paved Walking Trail	Lengthening of the paved walking trail
Additional Picnic Shelter	Addition revenue generation
Gazebo / Pergola	Addition revenue generation
Automatic Gate for Park Exit	Would allow the park to be one way, improving access



## Prioritized Facility Needs

Based on the facility inventory and assessment, these prioritized needs have been identified.

- Termination Point for the Boardwalk Trail: Loop or observation tower to give boardwalk a feeling of completion.
- Picnic Shelter: Addition picnic shelter on the site of the previous swing set near garden.
- Gazebo/ Pergola: Rentable space in the center of the native grassland and pollinator area on the site of the old baseball field.
- Automatic Gate for the exit to turn park roadway into one way entrance and exit condition.

## Operational Assessment

The Operational Assessment includes:

1. An inventory and classification of programs and services being provided at the site,
2. A review of staffing at the site,
3. A review of concessionaires and partners operating at the site,
4. Visitation and customer satisfaction, and
5. Professional development and training.

## Inventory and Classification of Programs and Services

Programs and services are classified into one of three major categories:

- 1) **Core or Essential Services;**
- 2) **Important Services; and**
- 3) **Value added or Visitor Supported Services.**

Functions of the site are classified into these categories based in part on the mission and public mandates for both the site and the agency. For the programs and services in each of these categories, there are financial performance expectations that will define how services are funded and evaluated.

### CATEGORY 1 – CORE SERVICES *[Largely supported by public subsidies]*

Core programs, services and facilities are those the agency must provide and/or are essential to capably govern and meet statutory requirements. The failure of the agency to provide Category 1 services at adequate levels could result in significant negative consequences for the public and the resources under protection. The criteria for programs or services to be classified as core or essential are:

- The services are mandated by the agency's law or charter or are contractually obligated by agreement to provide the services.
- The services are essential to protecting and supporting the public's health and safety.
- The services protect and maintain valuable assets and infrastructure.
- The services would generally and reasonably be expected and supported by residents, businesses, customers, and partners.
- The services are those that cannot or should not be provided by the private sector.
- The services provide a sound investment of public funds.

The following programs and services offered at Big Cypress Tree State Park have been identified as **core services**:

- Provide for public access to the park, the facilities, and the grounds.

- Provide for public safety for visitors and protection of natural and cultural resources.
- Provide for maintenance of grounds, facilities, and infrastructure.
- Maintain facilities developed through the LWCF program to required standards.
- Maintain Park drinking water and wastewater programs to state standards.
- Offer park-specific information at the Visitor Center and Nature Center.

### **CATEGORY 2 – IMPORTANT SERVICES** *[Supported by a balance of revenues and public subsidy]*

Important programs, services and facilities are those the agency should provide, and are important to governing and effectively serving residents, businesses, customers, and partners. Providing Category 2 services expands or enhances the agency's ability to provide and sustain its core services. The criteria for programs or services to be classified as important are:

- The services expand, enhance or support identified core services.
- The services are broadly supported and utilized by the community, and are considered an appropriate, important, and valuable public good. Public support may be conditional upon the manner by which the services are paid for or funded.
- The services generate income or revenue that offsets some or all the operating cost and/or are deemed to provide economic, social, or environmental outcomes or results.

The following programs and services have been identified as **important services**:

- Provide for basic, non-staff supported day-use activities (such as hiking and picnicking) with trails, informational signage, picnic tables, trash cans and restroom facilities.
- Provide a full range of environmental, cultural, and recreational programs.
- Picnic tables and picnic pavilions.
- Provide educational programs for schools and organized groups.

### **CATEGORY 3 – VISITOR SUPPORTED SERVICES** *[Almost exclusively supported by earned revenue]*

Visitor supported programs, services and facilities are those discretionary services that the agency may provide when additional funding or revenue exists to offset the cost of providing those services. Category 3 services provide added value above and beyond what is required or expected. The criteria for programs or services to be classified as visitor supported are:

- The services expand, enhance or support Core Services, Important Services and the quality of life of the visitors, community or stakeholders.
- The services are supported, valued and well utilized and provide an appropriate and valuable public benefit.
- The services generate income or funding from sponsorships, grants, user fees or other sources that offset some or all of their cost and/or provide a meaningful return on investment.
- The Services can possibly be provided through outsourcing or use of concessionaires, providing opportunities for community enterprise or services that may not otherwise be provided by the agency.

The following programs and services have been identified as **visitor-support services**:

- Workshops
- Tours
- Picnic Shelter

## Personnel / Staffing Review

Personnel and staffing at Big Cypress Tree State Park represent the largest area of budgetary expense at an average of 80% of the total operating budget each year for the last three complete years, which is higher than the target of labor costs not exceeding 65% of total operating expenditures. The tables below and on the following page provide a basic review of the current staffing at the site.

### Full Time Equivalent Employees

Position / Title	Quantity (FTE)	Compensation Total
Park Manager	1	*
Park Ranger	1	*
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>\$117,720</b>

\*Law enforcement compensation confidential by TN law.

### Labor Support

Labor Support	Annual Hours
Volunteers	150
Community Service Workers	
Engineering and Construction Crews	
Resource Management Crews	
<b>Other: NRM Students UTM</b>	<b>150</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>300</b>

### Total Labor Compensation Expense

Labor Type	Labor Expense
<b>Full Time Equivalent Employees</b>	<b>\$117,720</b>
<b>Part Time Employees</b>	<b>\$0</b>
<b>TOTAL Annual Labor Expense</b>	<b>\$117,720</b>

### Additional Future Positions Needed

Position / Title	Quantity	FTE or PT	Year Needed	Justification
Park Ranger 1	1	FTE	2025	Needed to cover all hours of operation
Clerk/Administrative Assistant	1	FTE	2024	For gift shop/ rentals/ visitor center
Maintenance	1	FTE	2024	For ground and facility maintenance
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3</b>			

## Financia Performance

Revenue per available unit for the last four years in overnight facilities is detailed in the table below.

### Current RevPAR

Fiscal Year	Picnic Shelter	Campground Rev Per Unit

	Rev Per Unit	
2019	\$0.96	N/A
2020	\$0.57	N/A
2021	\$1.35	\$0
2022	\$1.44	\$0

**Projected RevPAR** - Based on current RevPAR trends at the park and any known developments over the next four years.

Fiscal Year	Picnic Shelters Rev Per Unit	Campgrounds Rev Per Unit
2023	\$1.50	\$.10
2024	\$1.55	\$.15
2025	\$1.60	\$.20
2026	\$1.65	\$.25

## Customer Service

Platform / Site	Year	Customer Satisfaction Level
Google Review	2023	4.3
Trip Advisor	2023	4
Facebook	2023	5

## Professional Development and Training

The following professional development and training opportunities are being explored and planned for the staff and volunteers at this park:

- Wildland firefighting certifications to use controlled burns as a method of resource management
- Certified Interpretive Guide Training for all Staff
- Emergency Medical Responder Certification
- Hunters Education Instruction
- Tracking and Search and Rescue Training
- Routine management training
- Routine law enforcement training

## Summary of Key Recommendations

Please provide short-term, mid-term, and long-term recommendations for addressing operational issues at the park and improving overall park performance.

### Short Term Recommendations (Less than 1 year)

#### 1. Site and Facilities

- a. Increase interpretive displays on park grounds
- b. Replace Park Fencing
- c. Replace Playground

#### 2. Operations and Staffing

- a. Open Gift Shop operations at visitor center
- b. Attract park volunteers and Natural Resource Management Student from UTM
- c. Effectively utilize interpretive staff
- d. Maintain staff certifications like EMR and CIG

#### 3. Customer Service / Visitor Experience

- a. Continue hosting Homeschool Greenfield Schools students for field trips
- b. Increase hours of operation for visitor contact at Park Office/ Visitor Center
- c. Enforce recent rule changes involving hunting on the park to help reduce friction between recreation and hunter user types.

### Mid Term Recommendations (2–5 years)

#### 1. Site and Facilities

- a. Acquire property from Friends of Big Cypress Tree along the Highway 445
- b. Add a 2-mile loop trail on the upland portion of the natural area and state park
- c. Update current picnic shelter
- d. Add small aviary to interpret Birds of Prey

#### 2. Operations and Staffing

- a. Add additional needed positions like clerk/administrative assistant and maintenance worker
- b. Add additional Park Ranger 1

#### 3. Customer Service / Visitor Experience

- a. Open and operate gift shop
- b. Expand programs and special events

## Long Term Recommendations (5+ years)

### 1. Site and Facilities

- a. Add additional rentable structures like picnic shelters or pavilions
- b. Add a Nature center
- c. Complete loop and or observation tower on the boardwalk.
- d. Develop primitive camp to allow more use

### 2. Operations and Staffing

- a. Retain park staff
- b. Increase revenues through rentable spaces or events

### 3. Customer Service / Visitor Experience

- a. Grow gift shop capabilities
- b. Expand partnership with TWRA to allow visitors to utilize state property in the area

## Resource Management Plan

A resource management plan is a specific statement of the objectives you have for your land and natural resources, as well as any significant cultural and historic resources stewarded by the state park. This includes a defined series of priorities and activities that will take place in order to meet those objectives. This can include future potential land acquisitions or divestitures that are necessary to meet the park's resource management goals and objectives.

Balance the interpretive and operational needs of the park as well as implement a resource management model that highlights Big Cypress Tree State Natural Area with the ultimate mission of "bringing the natural area to the public." Appropriate resource management will decrease non-natives, increase "natural" feel of the park, and reduce manpower/cost requirements of current maintenance practices.

The contents of this resource management plan are as follows:

1. Resource Management Objectives
2. Resource Inventory and Assessment
3. Management Strategies
4. Priority Actions
5. Supplemental Information

## Resource Management Objectives

**Goal:** Tennessee State Parks will be nationally recognized for exemplary stewardship of natural and cultural resources.

**Objective - *More and better stewards:*** Increase internal and external stewards who share Tennessee State Parks core values and can contribute to the State Parks mission to steward Tennessee's natural and cultural resources.

**Objective - *Better resource management practices:*** Identify, manage, and restore unique natural and cultural resources for generations to come.

**Objective: *Better data and technology:*** Leverage data and technology to help inform and guide decisions on natural and cultural resources stewardship.

Aligned with these objectives are specific strategies to achieve the desired outcomes for the natural, cultural, and historic resources of this park.

### Strategies

Area 1: 1.6 acres of the location previously designated “ballfield”

- The end goal of this area is to remove exotic and invasive species and cultivate a restored natural grass land with abundant pollinator and seed-bearing natives. A successful restoration of this area will increase sightings of mammals, birds and pollinating insects as well as provide a beautiful wildflower plot for spring-fall enjoyment.

Area 2: 0.7-acre field from the handicap parking by the boardwalk trailhead to the home place site.

- This area will have similar parameters to the “ballfield” location with the addition of a clover ground cover in the small green space west of the concrete walking trail.

Area 3: .1-acre along roadway adjacent to the park office

- This area will be cultivated as a monarch way station. Native milkweed will be the predominate species.

Area 4: 2.8-acres belonging to Friends of Big Cypress Tree State Park

- This area will be cut and burned to create an inviting entrance into the park. Wildflowers to be planted aimed at creating a butterfly area.

### Five Year Plan

#### 1) Year 1

- a) Active Resource Management
  - i) Determine locations of native restoration areas.
  - ii) Establish seed list for replanting in year 2.
  - iii) Remove non-natives from garden and condition beds.
  - iv) Spray areas to be restored in fall with nonselective herbicide and grass selective herbicide.
  - v) Mark hazardous trees and trees in main picnic area for removal to ensure health of ecosystem and safety
- b) Passive Resource Management
  - i) Note prominent native species to replant/protect in restoration areas.
  - ii) Note prominent wildlife that use areas for plant mix adjustments in the future.

#### 2) Year 2

- a) Active Resource Management
  - i) Spray areas to be restored for a second time in spring with non-selective herbicide in spring.
  - ii) Seed drill areas 3-4 weeks after final spraying.
  - iii) Spring planting of natives in garden.
  - iv) Fall planting of natives in garden.
  - v) Install automatic irrigation for native plant gardens.
- b) Passive Resource Management
  - i) Monitor restored areas for non-native competition.
  - ii) Develop burn plan for restored areas and front field.
  - iii) Develop low intensity burn plan for wooded areas adjacent to picnic area, garden, and roadway to limit non-natives, leaf buildup, and enhance landscape/scenery.

- 3) Years 3-4
  - a) Active Resource Management
    - i) Implement burn plan and selectively remove non-natives from restored areas to prevent areal regression.
    - ii) Add additional species to increase pollinator and bird activity as needed.
- 4) Years 5
  - a) Measure success and re-visit resource management plan.

#### Constant/ Ongoing Resource Management

- 1) Hazardous Tree Removal
  - a) Focus on dangerous/dead trees in the common areas and around infrastructure.
  - b) Ash tree removal in areas around trails/ infrastructure due to impending infection by emerald ash bore beetle.
- 2) Non-native removal
  - a) Focus on non-native species mentioned in the Big Cypress Tree Natural Area Management plan and prevention of new species.

## Resource Inventory and Assessment

The significant natural, cultural and historic resources of the park requiring management are detailed below including a condition assessment rating for each. Condition assessments are selected from the following options based on what most describes the current condition of the resource:

1. **Excellent** – resource is in excellent condition; all potential threats to the integrity of the resource are currently managed and effectively mitigated.
2. **Good** – resource is generally in good condition and stable; threats to the integrity of the resource require regular management in order to mitigate.
3. **Fair** – resource is in stable condition but difficult to mitigate ongoing threats; additional management support is required.
4. **Poor** – resource is generally in poor condition with management support required to both improve existing conditions and address threats.
5. **Critical** – resource is highly threatened or deteriorated and requires immediate management prioritization.

Significant Park Resources	Quantity	Current Conditions	Notes
Upland Hardwood Forest	50 acres	Good	Most public forward facing areas well managed in recent years. Invasives a problem in the areas between upland and bottomland hardwood forest.
Bottomland Hardwood Forest	270 acres	Fair	Area in flux do to prolonged beaver impoundment. Management of beaver populations on the Obion River WMA.



Historic Structures	2	Poor/ Critical	Sawmill is almost entirely gone, and home place structure is on the demolition list. Management strategy at this time is to record data and interpret the structures in memory for the future.
Site of the Champion Big Cypress	40 acres	Unknown	Area has not been assessed by TDEC staff in 10+ years.

## Management Strategies

The management strategies outlined below are directly correlated to the resources identified previously in the *Resource Inventory and Assessment* section immediately above. These are general and overall management recommendations for each resource from which priority actions will be determined. Each resource has both a “Public Use” management strategy (which could include limited or no public access, or managed access with infrastructure and regulation) and a “General Management” strategy.

The priority assignments reflect the highest resource management priorities of the park over the next 1-5 years (High Priority) and 6-10 years (Moderate Priority)

Resource	Management Recommendations	Priority
Upland Hardwood Forest	<p><b>Public Use:</b> Paved walking trail passes through the forest.</p> <p><b>General Management:</b> Removal of hazardous trees and invasives as needed. Controlled burns to limit thick under growth on the eastern portion of the forest isolated by paved trails and road way.</p>	Moderate
Bottomland Hardwood Forest	<p><b>Public Use:</b> Boardwalk trail and river trail to the river. Hunting/trapping</p> <p><b>General Management:</b> Beaver management and hazardous tree removal. Area has been submerged due to beaver impoundment and caused the decline of mature trees throughout the bottomland.</p>	High
Historic Structures	<p><b>Public Use:</b> Accessed off of the paved section of the boardwalk trail.</p> <p><b>General Management:</b> Recording structure data and history. Removal due to structural decline imminent.</p>	High
Site of the Champion Big Cypress Tree	<p><b>Public Use:</b> Access by boat via middle fork of the obion river only.</p> <p><b>General Management:</b> Must establish access before best management practices can be established.</p>	High

## Land Management Strategies

In some cases, strategic land acquisitions or divestitures are necessary to meet the overall resource management goals and objectives of the park. This can include opportunities to address buffers, watersheds, viewsheds, inholdings, and adjacent properties. The table below details **general strategies** for land management. Timelines refer to Short Term (1-3 years), Mid Term (4-6 years), and Long Term (7-10 years).

Land Management Strategy	Timeline
Acquire Friends Group Property	Short
Acquire land or public easement to 40 acres north of the middle fork of the Obion River	Mid
Develop facilities/ infrastructure associated with North 40 acres	Long
Acquire land in order to offer overnight accommodations (camping)	Long

## Interpretive Programming and Education Plan

The Interpretation, Programming, and Education planning is currently going through a planning process to further build out the process. This section only represents the very basic framework. As TSP moves forward with the future of Interpretive programming and education this section will likely be changed to accommodate those modifications.

Attached to this plan are the Interpretive Program Templates in fillable PDF forms.

The serenity experienced at Big Cypress Tree State Park, including the sights and sounds of the Obion River bottomlands, provides a welcome escape into the undiscovered.

The interpretive purpose of Big Cypress Tree State Park is to bring the natural area to the public. The interpretive topics include the middle fork Obion river system, bottomland hardwood forests, native plants, pollinators, and birds. The park also offers hunting opportunities and education with its designation as a unit of the Obion River Wildlife Management Area. The park offers a unique opportunity to facilitate the cross examination of the opposing use types between Naturalist, Birders, and Hunters through the interpretive programming done on the park.

## Interpretation, Programming and Education Goals

**Goal:** Tennessee State Parks will be the most accessible, welcoming, and inviting system of parks that enriches Tennesseans and visitors through excellent interpretation, education, and resource-based recreation.

**Objective:** *accessible, welcoming, and inviting to all:* create quality and varied programs of interpretation, recreation, and outreach so that all audiences feel welcome and invited.

**Objective:** *high quality programming:* develop and support mission-based and resource-relevant programs to engage visitors, empower staff, and develop community wellbeing.

**Objective:** *resource-based outdoor recreation:* provide resource-based outdoor recreation opportunities that ensure representation of Tennessee's natural, scenic, and cultural resources.

Park Interpretation and Programs should be developed with the following desired outcomes:

- Building stewards
- Ensuring Equity
- Providing the Highest Value
- Developing Resource Based Programming
- Supporting Staff

## Strategic Programs and Services

The strategies detailed below with corresponding action plans are aligned with the Comprehensive Strategic Plan of Tennessee State Parks.

**Strategy – Telling Full Stories:** to identify and replicate best practices while establishing new methods for representing diverse, equitable, inclusive, and just dialogues.

### Action Plan:

- Update Park interpretive paneling to expand and refine the message conveyed to align with current park and system missions and goals more closely.
- Big Cypress Tree has traditionally focused on the Tennessee Titan and a loose connection to David Crocket as the main interpretive themes. The park will change the focus of interpretation towards the Middle Fork Obion River system, native plant/animal/insect populations, and the park's place in 8000-acre Obion River WMA complex while also paying homage to the natural areas original purpose and local history.

**Strategy – Interpretative Media:** Connecting people to the resources of Tennessee State Parks with technology in ways that compliment and expand interpretation within and beyond the park, giving everyone access to becoming a park steward.

### Action Plan:

- Use current technologies in order to reach a broader audience and record disappearing artifacts and records to preserve the past and tell richer stories
- Big Cypress Tree did not have any interpretive offerings before 2019 other than a single yearly Fall Festival, Boy Scouts of America events/ interpretation, and hikes led by Natural Area staff. The park has since created partnerships with the Weakley County School System in Greenfield, home school organizations around Weakley County and Martin, Tennessee Naturalists, and UT Martin organizations like the ecology club. The park will continue these relationships and continue to advertise opportunities through social media and local newspapers.

**Strategy –** Develop and maintain a portfolio of programs across multiple types of experiences:

- A. Interpretation of natural, historic, and cultural resources
- B. 3-5 unique experiences for all audiences
- C. Varying intensity from self-guided to immersive experiences
- D. Partnership opportunities for program delivery
- E. Varying costs to the user from “free to fee” based on value of the benefit to the participant and to the park.

### Action Plan:

- Big Cypress Tree will continue to offer a portfolio of programs the bring the natural area to the people. This will entail aspects of the natural world like native and migratory birds, plants, animals, and ecological systems (river bottoms/wetlands/upland forests). We bridge the gap between different use types such as naturalists, hunters, and farmers through our ranger lead nature hikes, bee keeping and native bee interpretation, and explanation of the park's connection to the local Wildlife Management Area. We will continue to expand our program offerings as we gain access to new interpretive tools.

**Strategy –** Develop and maintain diverse and varied resourced-based outdoor recreation opportunities across multiple types of experiences:

- A. Managing recreational use with the stewardship needs of the resource
- B. Varying intensity from self-guided to guided experiences
- C. Partnership opportunities for program delivery

- D. Varying costs to the user from “free to fee” based on value of the benefit to the participant and impact to the resource.

Action Plan:

- Big Cypress Tree currently offers ranger led nature hikes focused on plants, birds, and bottomland hardwood forests/wetlands. We also provide pelt demonstrations, reptile programs with the park’s corn snake, survival programs like native foraging and fire starting, and native plant restoration projects. We will focus on adding an aviary to the park for Raptor programming, add addition live animals like captive snakes, and expand water-based offerings like canoe trips.

HELPFUL DEFINITIONS:

- Nonpersonal Interpretation: Interpretive media that do not require a person to deliver a message (i.e., exhibits, waysides, brochures, signs, magazines, books, etc.).
- Personal Interpretation: One person or persons providing interpretation to another person or persons.
- Interpretive Program: Activities, presentations, publications, audio-visual media, signs, and exhibits that convey key heritage resource messages to audiences. (Adapted from US Fish & Wildlife Service)
- Interpretation: a purposeful approach to communication that facilitates meaningful, relevant, and inclusive experiences that deepen understanding, broaden perspectives, and inspire engagement with the world around us.

## Financial Performance Goals

Financial performance goals are a critical performance management tool of the Tennessee State Park System. While the financial performance of parks are managed more intently at the system level, individual parks are expected to recover a portion of their operating costs through the generation of earned revenues where appropriate and to contribute to the system goals. The majority of earned revenues at state parks are generated through facility usage (campsites, cabins, lodge rooms, rentable pavilions, etc.), the delivery of fee-based programs and services, equipment rental and usage, and retail sales. Other forms of revenue generation come from golf courses and restaurants where those amenities are present. That said, not all parks have the same ability to generate earned revenues because the availability of facilities or programs vary widely from one park to the next. The “recovery” of operational costs by earned revenues is referred to as “cost recovery”. Operating costs beyond those supported by earned revenues represent the extent to which state funding support operations at each park.

The table below represents the overall park cost recovery for this specific park for the most recent fiscal year and forecast estimates for the upcoming five years. These estimates are based on projection estimates for known and foreseeable costs and recovery figures.

FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE GOALS						
	Current Cost Recovery (2022)	Target Cost Recovery: FY 2023	Target Cost Recovery: FY 2024	Target Cost Recovery: FY: 2025	Target Cost Recovery: FY 2026	Target Cost Recovery: FY 2027
Park Overall	1%	.87%	1.2%	1.6%	2.0%	2.2%

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